

## COVID-19: Masking in Schools

### | Background

Central District Health (CDH) recognizes the value of in-person learning and the challenge of balancing the risks of COVID-19 and educational, social, and emotional supports. While COVID-19 is circulating in the United States, measures need to be taken in order to ensure that schools operate in a way that minimizes risk to students, staff, and the community.

**CDH continues to recommend universal masking in schools for teachers, staff, students and visitors.\*** When you wear a mask, you protect others as well as yourself. The utilization of school quarantine procedures released by CDH and the Idaho Governor's office and physical distancing guidance released by the CDC and CDH, are contingent on universal masking practices in schools.

*\*When universal masking is practiced, everyone in the facility who is able to wear a mask does so. Masks fit correctly and completely cover the nose and mouth without gapping. The CDC offers the following guidance on [How to Wear Masks](#).*

### | Masking is an Effective Way to Reduce Transmission

The CDC reports that COVID-19 spreads primarily from person to person through respiratory droplets that travel into the air when individuals cough, sneeze, talk, or shout. Once these droplets are expelled into the air, they can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or they may breathe these droplets in.

Studies show that masks reduce the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth. Students and staff should wear a mask, even if they do not feel sick. Several studies have found that people with COVID-19 who never develop symptoms and those who are not yet showing COVID-19 symptoms can still spread the virus to others.

In indoor congregate settings of individuals who do not reside together, like schools, it is particularly important that individuals practice universal masking to protect themselves and those around them.

CDC- [Guidance for Wearing Masks](#)

## **| Masking and Quarantine Procedures**

CDH and the Idaho Governor's office have released [K-12 School Quarantine](#) guidance allowing students identified as close contacts, who experience no symptoms, to attend in-person classes.\*

This policy is only recommended if universal masking was practiced by all parties involved in the exposure. Without universal masking protocol in school facilities, CDH does not recommend utilization of this quarantine procedure. In this case, it is advised that close contacts are removed from all activities, including in-person learning.

Removing or reducing masking protocol in school settings would likely result in elevated quarantines and fewer students able to attend in-person learning.

*\* This does not extend to extracurricular activities, sports, community events, parties/gatherings and other similar activities.*

## **| Masking and Physical Distancing Procedures**

The CDC and CDH have released guidance on [Physical Distancing in Classrooms](#) allowing for a decrease in distancing when local transmission level criteria have been met.

- In elementary schools, all students remain at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal — regardless of whether community transmission is low, moderate, substantial, or high.\*
- In middle and high schools, students should be at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal and in communities where transmission is low, moderate, or substantial.\*
- Middle school and high school students should be at least 6 feet apart in communities where transmission is high, and universal masking is practiced.\*

Without universal masking practices, the use of this guidance is not recommended at any facility.

*\*This guidance is based on CDC transmission criteria. Information on the conversion of CDC and CDH transmission criteria can be found in our [School Crosswalk Document](#).*

## **Resources for Use + More Information:**

CDC - How to Wear a Cloth Face Covering: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wear-cloth-facecoverings.html>

CDC - When to Quarantine: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.htm>